

Studies in English, New Series

Volume 5 *Special American Literature Issue*,
1984-1987

Article 29

1984

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Recommended Citation

Kellner, Robert Scott (1984) "Slaves and Shrews: Women in Melville's Short Stories," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 5 , Article 29.

Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol5/iss1/29

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SLAVES AND SHREWS:
WOMEN IN MELVILLE'S SHORT STORIES

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There are few women in Herman Melville's major novels. In an age when most novels were not only written for women, who comprised the majority of the reading public, but about women, Melville's work appears to some as an anomaly. William Wasserstrom, writing about the genteel tradition and the novel of sentiment in *Heiress of All the Ages*, all but excludes Melville from his study: "the matter of love was too much circumscribed" for Melville, he writes.¹

Melville, however, was not immune to the influence exerted by the literary tradition in which he was working. He simply did not present women in the typical way. There are two conflicting critical overviews of the portrayal of love in American literature: one sees the American writer portraying love as a successful moral force, guiding and shaping American destiny; the other declares that a less positive attitude exists, where the uncertainties and anxieties of existence are not resolved by love.² Melville's fiction belongs in the latter category; it pronounces the limitations and even the failure of love.

Melville's first novel, *Typee*, initially presents an idyllic encounter between an American male and a native girl. But the hero quickly discovers flaws in his South Seas Eden. Fayaway's sweet ministrations are suspect. The beautiful Polynesian girl is in the service of the cannibal chiefs. "What could be their object in treating me with such apparent kindness," asks the young man, "and did it not cover some treacherous scheme?"³ In his next novel, *Omoo*, Melville portrays women as sensual creatures who enjoy abusing men physically and spiritually. And in his third novel, *Mardi*, we find the influence of Poe's "Ligeia," where the concept of female innocence and chasteness is brought into question. Trying to enjoy the embrace of the beautiful Yillah, who embodies ideal love, young Taji is pursued by the twin spectres of lust and death. These first three novels are thematically related by the protagonists' search for, discovery of, and disillusionment with love—not just spiritual, but physical, sexual love.

Women either do not appear at all or have very minor roles in Melville's next three novels, including *Moby-Dick*. The most sustained treatment of women is found in Melville's seventh book, *Pierre*

[A detailed study of this novel appears in Kellner's "Sex, Toads, and Scorpions: A Study of the Psychological Themes in Melville's *Pierre*," *Arizona Quarterly*, 31 (1975)]. In this novel, love leads to the death not only of the young hero, but of his mother, sister, and fiancée. Although *Pierre* is Melville's most comprehensive depiction of the contradictions of human sexuality, it is not his final portrayal of women. In his short stories—Melville turned to magazines for a more profitable return on his writing—he continues to emphasize the deleterious nature of women and the negative aspects of sex. There is very little that is gray in the depiction of female characters in his short stories. Melville presents women as either slaves or shrews; there is no in-between. Despite critical acclaim to the contrary, what we discover in Melville's short stories is one of the most consistently negative portrayals of women in American literature.

The second story in Melville's diptych "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" has received considerable attention as an example of his artistic concealment, his ability to present controversial, in this case sexual, subjects both symbolically and allegorically.⁴ In "The Tartarus of Maids," Melville was so successful that few if any of his contemporaries—and certainly not the publisher of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, where the story first appeared—discerned the real meaning of the paper-mill imagery.

Modern readers understand that the story is more than an allegory about sexual reproduction; it is also an attack on the Machine Age. Melville wanted to alert his audience to the dehumanizing aspects of industrialization, the onslaught of the machine and the attendant loss of the human spirit. In a perceptive article, Marvin Fisher notes both themes. He discusses the sexual allegory in terms of "submissive and suffering femininity" and relates that to the "aggressive impersonal force" of industrialization.⁵ But Fisher and critics in general fail to relate their discussion of submissive women in this story to a similar pattern of female characterization that appears in Melville's works. Fisher consciously glosses over this in order to focus his attention on the social satire. Of the two themes in this story, the sexual allegory and the rebuke of the Machine Age, Fisher writes: "It is the second [theme] that has been more provocative, and I mean to look at the first only long enough to establish some links and suggest the unity of the whole design."⁶ While a number of critics, beginning with E. H. Eby in 1940, interested themselves in the imagery of this story only to the extent that it reveals the sexual allegory, Fisher

investigates the sexual allegory only as it underscores Melville's denunciation of the industrial process. The imagery is yet to be carefully studied for what it reveals about the female characters.

Melville uses Tartarus, the lowest region of hell, as the setting for the paper mill, indicating on one level that industrialization is hell. But it also reflects on the sexual meaning, as Melville later makes clear, that women and the function of procreation and human reproduction are part of the devil's domain. The seedsman's entry into Tartarus, represented as man's sexual entry into woman, is through a "Dantean gateway"⁷; those who enter into a sexual liaison with women give up all hope.

Such sexual contact, which should be warm and passionate (especially in Tartarus), is paradoxically cold and dispassionate. There is no warmth for the seedsman in Tartarus, despite his contact with the maids. The first woman he encounters has a face "pale with work and blue with cold; an eye supernatural with unrelated misery" (SW, p. 201). He is "stiff with frost" when he enters the mill (SW, p. 201). The cold and ghostly appearance of the maids may not entirely be caused by the unthinking, dehumanizing, industrial processes. The possibility exists that Melville is commenting about women themselves. How can the sexual drive, supposedly warm and passionate, exist in such frigid creatures as women?

Melville's imagery to describe the sex act and the female genitalia goes far beyond anything that relates to either a simple allegory of procreation or a reproach to the industrialists. The female sex organ is the "Devil's Dungeon" from which "Blood River" emerges, "one turbid brick-colored stream, boiling through a flume among enormous boulders" (SW, p. 196)—a river of blood that boils "demoniacally" (SW, p. 200). The maids are more than dehumanized; they are monstrous. To enter this Devil's Dungeon, the seedsman has to fight a violent blast of wind while pushing through the "narrow notch"; and the wind that results makes him think not of anything positive like the onset of procreation, but of "lost spirits bound to the unhappy world" (SW, p. 198). Once inside to view the inner works of the paper mill, the seedsman is greatly disturbed by the "inflexible iron animal." The machinery, the female body, "strikes, in some moods, strange dread into the human heart, as some living, panting Behemoth might" (SW, p. 209). When examined close up, the mystery of woman is far from awe-inspiring: "the thing is a mere machine," the seedsman determines, "the essence of which is unvarying punctuality and precision"

(SW, p. 207).

The most significant feature in this story is not Melville's disgust with women and sex. This is not new in Melville's writings. It appears as early as his third book *Mardi* in his portrayal of Hautia. What seems to interest him most in the "The Tartarus of Maids" and in his other short stories is the remarkable submissiveness of women, their slavish acceptance of whatever life throws at them. The maids might be in the paper mill against their will, but not one of them rebels. They are all docile, "like so many mares haltered to the rack" (SW, p. 203). writes Melville. "They slowly, mournfully, beseechingly, yet unresistingly" (SW, p. 209) go through the procreative process. There is no evidence in the text to back up such assertions as Ray B. Browne's in *Melville's Drive to Humanism* that the diptych is a contrast between Melville's "uncommitted person with those who were very much committed, the male bachelors by choice as opposed to the female bachelor against her will."⁸ One wonders what commitment he is talking about. The women are pale, passive, unprotesting automatons, slaves to the "dark-complexioned man," Satan, in charge of the mill.

Almost all of Melville's other slaves to authority rebel—or at least harbor rebellious thoughts. From Tommo to Billy Budd, his sailors are conscious and protective of their own individuality. Tommo and Omoo jump ship; White Jacket contemplates throwing himself and his tyrannical captain overboard; and Billy Budd flails out instinctively against his false accuser. In Melville's other short stories, imprisoned black slaves overthrow their masters; scribes refuse to work; even a machine turns against its master-creator. But Melville's women rarely rebel. They are passive to the extent of being suicidal. In "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," Hunilla is raped not once but twice and does nothing to raise fortifications against the possibility of new assaults; in "The Piazza" Marianna fears to journey down the mountainside to possible safety and rejuvenation; and in "The Tartarus of Maids" the maids in the paper mill go through their twelve hours a day, 365 days a year totally mute and unprotesting.

One wonders how "The Tartarus of Maids" would have ended had the paper mill been staffed with the black Babo and his friends instead of the silent maids. Warner Berthoff, quoting from *White Jacket*, credits Melville more than he deserves when he says that Melville reminds us "of the simplest instinct of life that is in every earthly creature, an instinct 'diffused through all animate nature, the same that prompts even a worm to turn under the heel.'"⁹ That instinct

might be in Melville's men, in *Babo* and *White Jacket*, but it is not in the maids.

It is interesting to consider another author's treatment of this same subject. In Charles Knight's "The Spirit of Discontent," written just a few years before Melville's "The Tartarus of Maids," a factory girl undergoes the same dehumanization depicted by Melville; she is a slave to her machine. Unlike Melville's maids, this girl rebels against her enslavement: "Up before day, at the clang of the bell—into the mill, and at work, in obedience to that ding-dong of a bell—just as though we were so many living machines. I will give my notice tomorrow: go, I will—I won't stay here and be a white slave."¹⁰

No such potential heroine emerges in Melville's paper mill. Melville presents his maids as victims, both of the industrialization process and of their own sex organs, but they are such unprotesting victims that the reader does not feel sorry for them. It is not true, as Browne suggests, that "Melville's sympathy lies with [the maids] and all they symbolize."¹¹ The maids are slaves to their own bodies and entirely submissive to the social system; Melville does not sympathize with such docility. The paper mill machines are "menially served" by the women, "served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan" (SW, p. 202). They are "their own executioners; themselves whetting the very swords that slay them" (SW, p. 205). Language such as this to describe the maids—"menial," "mute," and "cringing"—does not convince us of Melville's "growth in understanding and sympathy"¹² as Fisher insists.

The one woman in Melville's short stories who appears to get his sympathy, at least on the surface, is the Chola widow in the eighth sketch of "The Encantadas." Along with her husband and brother, Hunilla is stranded on a barren island in the Pacific. They had engaged round-trip passage to the island to gather tortoise oil. But after collecting the round trip fee and dropping them off, the scheming captain left without any intention of returning. Shortly afterward, the two men drown, a scene that Hunilla helplessly witnesses, and the woman is left completely alone, not to be rescued for three years.

Most critics feel that Hunilla's virtue lies in her patience and faith and that Melville's intention was to underscore this patience, a theme that these critics see in several of his short stories. Leon Howard, for instance, remarks that the separate portraits of Hunilla and *Bartleby* depict the "theme of nonaggressive but unshakable patience," themes that according to Howard also appear in his stories "Cook-a-Doodle-

Doo!" and "The Piazza."¹³ Warner Berthoff also associates Hunilla with Bartleby. "Hunilla and Bartleby," he writes in *The Example of Melville*, "came to represent for Melville some general truth about the capacity and fortune of the human creature."¹⁴

Hunilla, though, is not a female Bartleby. Bartleby deliberately brings about his own situation; he is not a victim of fate. His refusal to participate in life can be viewed in part as a heroic rebellion, quite Thoreauvian in its own way, against the industrialized and corporate state. Bartleby's inaction is based on a personal decision, one that is reiterated throughout the story. The reader knows that Bartleby can act otherwise—should he *prefer* to. Browne points out Bartleby's strength: "There has seldom been a more poignant, all-knowing, and superior statement than Bartleby's response: 'I know where I am.' No longer a victim, even in appearance, Bartleby is master of the situation."¹⁵ In no way is Hunilla similarly master of her situation. She is as passive and submissive as any of Melville's Tartarus maids. Melville's depiction of her as one who "gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail"¹⁶ while watching her husband and brother die is the image we get of her throughout her entire three-year stay on the island.

Being deserted on an island puts Hunilla in the company of Defoe's famous hermit. Melville even mentions Robinson Crusoe in the story, inviting our comparison between the deserted woman and the ingenious sailor of Defoe's tale. But the only real parallel is that both Crusoe and Hunilla have to learn to mark the passage of time: "As to poor Crusoe in the self-same sea, no saint's bell pealed forth the lapse of week or month" (PT, p. 226). And this is about all Hunilla does: she marks time. Unlike Crusoe, who creates for himself a new world where he learns to master both his environment and his own being, Hunilla is completely buffeted by fate.

Perhaps Melville's original intention was, as Leon Howard and others insist, to draw a picture of an Agatha figure, the patient and all-suffering woman. But his reference to Robinson Crusoe creates a conflicting image. Nowhere in the story of Hunilla, which covers a three-year period, do we discover the determination of spirit and ingenuity of mind that we associate with a Crusoe figure. We do not know how Hunilla manages to remain alive and retain her sanity during her involuntary exile from civilization. The fact is she does nothing actively to save herself. When her husband and brother drown, she lives on for the next three years in a semicomatose state. The work

which the three were engaged in before the death of the two men is immediately and permanently discontinued. When her rescuers arrive at the widow's camp, they see the pots of tortoise oil that her husband and brother had collected. Her inactivity is manifest: "In a pot near by were the caked crusts of a quantity which had been permitted to evaporate. 'They meant to have strained it off next day,' said Hunilla, as she turned aside" (PT, p. 232). She had given up their work entirely. Even the hut where she lived for the past three years "seemed an abandoned hay-rick, whose haymakers were now no more" (PT, p. 231). Instead of being her own place after three years of use, it is still the old hut of Felipe and Truxill. Hunilla's survival is apparently the result of luck and nothing else. She has even allowed her two dogs to multiply into ten, letting them share her precious water, "never laying by any considerable store against those prolonged and utter droughts which, in some disastrous seasons, warp these isles" (PT, p. 232).

There is also in this story the association between women and death that Melville makes in *Mardi* and *Pierre*: the fatal embrace of Hautia and Isabel. But in the Chola widow sketch, the situation is reversed. Instead of sex leading to death, the death of Felipe and Truxill leave Hunilla unprotected, and she is raped on two different occasions by whalemens. She does nothing to guard against new assaults. She might have gathered tortoise oil to bribe future whalemens to protect her and even take her off the island; or she might have built a stronger hut to keep them from getting at her. But she lacks the will; consequently, she is prey to stronger natures.

Such inattention to possible emergencies and passivity in the face of life-threatening situations should make the critical reader of this story question such unqualified praise as Bernstein's "Alone, without hope, at the mercy of the elements, Hunilla continues her courageous struggle for life."¹⁷ Hunilla is not a struggler. She survives in spite of herself. She does not show any interest in life. And she is certainly not the "superwoman" that Browne incredibly calls her.¹⁸ She is a defeatist actually, a quitter, another Tartarus maid who is overwhelmed by a harsh and indifferent universe.

The other woman in *The Piazza Tales*, Marianna in "The Piazza," is just like Hunilla in temperament and in situation. But instead of being stranded on a Pacific island, she is alone and isolated in the Berkshire mountains. And instead of doing anything to improve or change her situation, she too remains passive and totally submissive to her fate. Most critics see this story as a study of human subjectivity,

a lesson in vision, perspective, and illusion.¹⁹ These assessments of the story are valuable mostly for their treatment of Melville's narrator—even when their conclusions about the narrator are totally at variance. For instance, William Bysshe Stein sees the narrator withdrawn from a “dynamic involvement in life,”²⁰ while Leon Howard sees the narrator as a reincarnation of the old Melville, once again “free from his self-centered broodings,”²¹ apparently ready to return to a dynamic involvement with life. The main problem with most of these readings is that the focus is almost entirely on the narrator, either ignoring for the most part the young woman, Marianna, or failing to treat her with the same critical intensity given the narrator. The reader is not only interested in the narrator, but in Marianna as well, and wonders about *her* withdrawal from and possible re-entry into life. What are her chances of imitating the narrator and breaking free from the limitations of her immediate environment, and from the imprisoning forces of her own fears?

When the narrator first sees Marianna's house, it is a gloomy autumn day, when the woods and sky are smoke-gray. The house, seen from a considerable distance, is “One spot of radiance, where all else was shade” (PT, p. 6). When he spots it the second time, it is after a gentle shower; the house can be seen at the rainbow's end. His thoughts about the house are fanciful, that it was situated in a spot surrounded by “some haunted ring where fairies dance” (PT, p. 6). He imagines a “queen of fairies at her fairy-window” sitting in the house or coming back down to earth, “at any rate, some glad mountain-girl” (PT, p. 8). The image is a bright one, and positive, by which the girl is pictured in ideal terms, another Fayaway or possibly another Yillah. And, indeed, Marianna is compared to both these Melville characters. At first sight of her, the narrator thinks she is like “some Tahiti girl, secreted for a sacrifice” (PT, p. 12). But this comment reveals a dark ambivalence that clashes with the image of brightness. The combination of women and death, typical of Melville, foreshadows Marianna's fate.

Also intermingled with the bright images of radiant fairy-rings and rainbow ends are dark and foreboding images. The autumn day when Marianna's house is first spotted is bleak and gray, and there is a reference to “guilty Macbeth and foreboding Banquo” (PT, p. 6) that brings the story into an ambiguous association with treachery and death. The images of light are especially cast in ambivalent terms. The reflection of the sun off Marianna's newly shingled roof is de-

scribed as "a broader gleam, as of a silver buckler, held sunward over some croucher's head" (PT, p. 7). And the shifting light in the Berkshire hills makes the narrator think of the "old wars of Lucifer and Michael" (PT, p. 7).

R. W. B. Lewis does not refer to this story in his consideration of "Melville the myth-maker at work upon the matter of Adam,"²² but he might have. The journey to the "fairy-land" symbolizes in part the narrator's desire to return to the Edenic state. He wishes to "cure this weariness of life" (PT, p. 8). When he nears Marianna's cabin, he spots some fruit on the ground: "Red apples rolled before him; Eve's apples." And in a recreated scene from Genesis, the narrator bites into one: "it tastes of the ground" (PT, p. 10). What he has entered is a blighted Eden; he will find that it is inhabited by a subdued Eve.

Marianna has been left alone on the mountain by the death of her brother. In her isolation she is more like Tennyson's Marianna than Shakespeare's. Melville's character, like Tennyson's, feels that life is dreary and not worth living. She is afraid to venture into the world alone, and her refusal to get over her fears is tantamount to a death wish: "I go a little way; but soon come back again. Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know—those in the woods are strangers" (PT, p. 16). So she remains at the house, slowly wasting away, victim to her own fears.

She is not entirely to blame for her situation. Like the Tartarus maids, Marianna is to some extent a victim of her society; her fears are partly a result of society's limitations of females, of the designated and regulated roles that women are obliged to play. Also like the Tartarus maids, Marianna is "A pale-cheeked girl" (PT, p. 12) drained of all vital energy. She feels chained to her role as woman: "mine is mostly but dull woman's work—sitting, sitting, restless sitting" (PT, p. 16). She is not expected to be venturesome, and so she remains where she is, stagnating and dying in body as well as spirit.

Yet the story of Marianna is only partly an indictment of society's role-making. There is something within Marianna herself—as there is within Hunilla—that keeps her from taking a more active part in her own survival and fulfillment. She recognizes that it is not the environment that "wearies" her; "it is not the view," she admits, "it is Marianna" (PT, p. 12). Something within her own system is contributing to her disintegration as an active human being. She is the human counterpart of the Chinese creeper seen earlier by the narrator near his home. Although newly burst into bloom, "if you removed the leaves a

little, showed millions of strange cankerous worms, which, feeding upon those blossoms, so shared their blessed hue, as to make it unblessed evermore—worms, whose germs had doubtless lurked in the very bulb which, so hopefully, I had planted” (PT, p. 8). Beneath the radiant appearance of the fairy scene that had first attracted the narrator and beneath the enchanting—albeit pallid—Tahitian face of Marianna, are cankerous flaws.

“The Piazza” offers us an interesting contrast between the flawed person who gives in to her weariness, Marianna, and another who takes action to overcome his ennui, the narrator. It is the woman who gives in to her condition and wastes away; it is the man who is inquisitive, who determines to cure his weariness and overcomes his cankerous worms by going out into the world. The narrator is eager to seek out new discoveries about his environment and his perception of that environment. While Marianna, who has a similar wish—“Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house” (PT, p. 17)—never really tries. The narrator saw Marianna’s cabin from afar and made up his mind to travel to it. His house was equally visible to her. It appeared through the mountain haze “less a farm-house than King Charming’s palace” (PT, p. 12), and though she wonders about the house’s occupant, she does not journey there; she lacks the inner strength. There is in Marianna the same suicidal passivity that one finds in Hunilla and the Tartarus maids. She resides, as Stein says, “in an emotional waste land,”²³ and perhaps no journey, not even one to King Charming’s house, would save her.

There are women in Melville’s writings who do not submit quietly to authority. Some of his portrayals are polar opposites of the Marianna-Hunilla figure. The irrepressible Annatoo, Samoa’s wife in *Mardi*, is probably the best example of the independent and active Melville woman; and the Widow Glendinning, mother of Pierre, is a study in haughty imperiousness, a far cry from a pale Tartarus maid. But what the reader finds objectionable in the neurotic submissiveness of the Marianna types, he finds equally objectionable in the psychotic authoritarianism of the Glendinning figures, for linking these two extremes of characterization is that great emotional wasteland wherein all Melville’s women reside.

The wife in “I and My Chimney” is the non-passive woman in Melville’s shorter tales. She has drawn praise from some critics, most especially Browne, who calls her the extreme of “a sensible point of view”²⁴ and sees her as a symbol of Young America. But she is actu

Robert Scott Kellner

307

ally a self-centered shrew, quite in keeping with Melville's two other similar female characters, Annatoo and Mrs. Glendinning. The wife wants the chimney removed so that she can have a fine entrance hall in its place. She is as persistent as the wives in *Omoo* who were constantly nagging their husbands to obtain sailors' sea-chests for them. "How often my wife was at me" (SW, p. 384) muses the narrator in "I and My Chimney." "[S]he puts down her foot" with the same energy that she "puts down her preserves and pickles" (SW, p. 386). Like Annatoo, "she overflows with her schemes" (SW, p. 386), determined to have her own way. And there is no suggestion of a heroic quality as we find in *Bartleby*. She is not above plotting against her husband. "More than ever now I suspected a plot" (SW, p. 404), the besieged narrator complains. Her actions to have the chimney dismantled against his will, especially when she contrives to have it taken down while he is away, are, to say the least, sneaky: "Not more ruthlessly did the Three Powers partition away poor Poland, than my wife and daughter would fain partition away my chimney" (SW, p. 405).

Merton Sealts sees this story as allegorizing a physical and mental examination Melville was persuaded by his family to undertake. The wife in the story is actually modeled after Melville's mother: "It is significant that Melville's mother is said to be the original of the character in 'I and My Chimney' who instigates the examination."²⁵ Considering Melville's portrayal of Mrs. Glendinning as a mother-wife figure for *Pierre*, this suggested transposition of mother and wife in "I and My Chimney" helps to establish the true temperament of the narrator's wife.

Whether by wife or mother, the narrator, comparing himself to King Lear, is "stripped by degrees of one masculine prerogative after another" (SW, pp. 387-388). The chimney is a part of himself, an extension of his heart and mind, and he won't have that stripped away. "To break into that wall would be to break into his breast" (SW, p. 406), he says, referring to his father who built the chimney, though actually speaking of himself. John Bryant tells us the chimney "is the speaker's alter ego and endures with him the onslaught of old age, impotence, and domesticity."²⁶ The narrator and his chimney "smoke and philosophize together" while his wife, "like all the rest of the world, cares not a fig for my philosophical jabber" (SW, p. 406). Despite her readings in history and her study of French, she is shallow. Her failure to understand the narrator's feelings for the chimney, her

lack of sympathy for an object of such importance to him, is as telling as Mrs. Glendinning's attack on Delly and later on Isabel. Both Glendinning and the narrator's wife are lacking in sentiment, that most humanizing of all human ingredients.

Without the virtue of sentiment, his wife is like the machine in Tartarus, never ill, always on the go, caring for nothing but her own insatiable desire to function. She is the embodiment of progress that Melville satirizes in "The Tartarus of Maids": "Whatever is, is wrong; and what is more, must be altered; and what is still more, must be altered right away" (SW, p. 385). She is the "monsoon" that blows "a brisk gale" over his life (SW, p. 387). In the name of improvement and progress, she ultimately destroys. The wife's "terrible alacrity for improvement," Melville writes, "is a softer name for destruction" (SW, p. 406).

We find, then, in Melville's short stories, females who consciously or unconsciously destroy themselves: slaves like the Tartarus maids who dare not rebel, weaklings like Hunilla and Marianna who cannot withstand the adversities of life. Or we find shrews, like the wife in "I and My Chimney" whose lack of sentiments threatens the well-being of those around her. We can only speculate about Melville's purpose in portraying women in this fashion. To some extent his female characters, like his male protagonists, embody a particular side of human nature, some passive and enduring (what we might call the Billy Budd type), others violent and unpredictable (the Ahab type). As allegorical figures, they instruct us about the extremes of the human condition. There is, though, a biographical element in many of Melville's stories, beginning with his first novel, *Typee*, and especially notable in *Pierre* and some of the short stories, i.e. "The Piazza" and "I and My Chimney." In this regard we might remark on Melville's seeming lack of empathy with and sympathy for women. No matter how we view the portrayals, there are no heroic women or even women of the middle ground in his stories; just the slaves and the shrews, the one suicidal, the other homicidal—not a very endearing picture of women.

NOTES

¹ (Minneapolis, 1959), p. 123.

² This controversy has been well documented and need not be reproduced here. The major positions are stated below: Herbert Ross Brown in *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (New York, 1940, 1970) not only states that the novelists believed in the efficacy of love, but that the

sentimental novel relied upon a belief "in the spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man's original instincts" (p. 176). Wasserstrom in *Heiress* agrees with Brown and sees the American novel representing the success of love. Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1966), writes convincingly from the opposite point of view. To him the American novel represents the failures of love; women are either angels or vipers, and men are emasculated by them. "Fiedler is brilliant but wrong," writes Wasserstrom on page 131 of *Heiress*.

³ *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (Evanston and Chicago, 1968), p. 32. Jane Mushabac in *Melville's Humor: A Critical Study* (Hamden, Conn., 1981), has some telling commentary on *Typee*: "As he himself tells us in reference to the pursor's steward in *White-Jacket*, humor just come up quietly and straight-faced on the reader, or else, with waggery and high jinks, take the reader by storm. In various incidents like that of the popgun war, or of the two ladies early in the book, Melville is straining for comicality. With regard to the later, however, perhaps these incidents suggest Melville's clumsiness with male-female comedy. Although with *Fayaway* Melville transcends his usual self-consciousness about ladies, when he speaks of other women in the novel, he seems to be rebelling too hard or giving in too slavishly" (p. 49).

⁴ E. H. Eby, "Herman Melville's 'Tartarus of Maids,'" *MLQ*, 1 (1940), 95-100. Eby says that Melville's main intention in "The Tartarus of Maids" is to represent "the biological burdens imposed on women because they bear the children." See also W. R. Thompson, "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids: A Reinterpretation," *AQ*, 9 (1957), 34-45; and Beryl Rowland, "Melville's Bachelors and Maids: Interpretation through Symbol and Metaphor," *AL*, 41 (1969), 389-405.

⁵ Marvin Fisher, "Melville's 'Tartarus': The Deflowering of New England," *AQ*, 23 (1971), 81.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," *Selected Writings of Herman Melville* (New York, 1952), p. 195. Hereafter cited as SW.

⁸ Ray B. Browne, *Melville's Drive to Humanism* (Bloomington, 1962), p. 229.

⁹ Warner Berthoff, *The Example of Melville* (Princeton, 1962), p. 99.

¹⁰ Charles Knight, *Mind Amongst the Spindles* (Boston, 1845), p. 37.

¹¹ Browne, p. 229.

¹² Fisher, p. 99.

¹³ Leon Howard, *Herman Melville, A Biography* (Berkeley, 1951), p. 208. He also states: "Bartleby, Merrymusk, and Hunilla were all products of the same ferment which stirred him to reread Spenser" (p. 211).

¹⁴ Berthoff, p. 102.

¹⁵ Browne, p. 165.

¹⁶ *The Piazza Tales* [*The Works of Herman Melville*] (New York, 1963), 10:224. Hereafter cited as PT.

¹⁷ John Bernstein, *Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville* (The Hague, 1964), p. 178.

¹⁸ Browne, p. 294.

¹⁹ See especially Leon Howard: "The story was a parable of what Melville called, in *The Confidence Man*, 'the mystery of human subjectivity' " (p. 230).

²⁰ William Bysshe Stein, "Melville's Comedy of Faith," *ELH*, 27 (1960), p. 331.

²¹ Howard, p. 230.

²² R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago, 1955), p. 131.

²³ Stein, p. 331.

²⁴ Browne, p. 266.

²⁵ Merton M. Sealts, "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney,'" *AL*, 13 (1941), p. 152.

²⁶ John Bryant, "Melville's Comic Debate: Geniality and the Aesthetics of Repose," *AL*, 55 (1983), p. 169.